PUVA Therapy
: psoralen & ultra violet light (phototherapy)

Information for patients

Therapy Services

Physiotherapy Department
01625 661481
**Introduction**
Your doctor or consultant has recommended a course of Ultraviolet light treatment for your skin condition. This leaflet explains about the treatment and the risks involved.

**What is PUVA ?**
Ultraviolet (UV) rays are produced by the sun. Although they can’t be seen, they are an important part of sunlight and are grouped into different wavelengths: UVA, UVB and UVC.
- UVA rays penetrate the skin and cause it to darken or tan.
- UVB rays are mostly absorbed by the epidermis, which is the top layer of our skin and is responsible for sunburn.
- UVC rays are absorbed by the Earth's ozone layer, so they do not reach us.

For many years artificial ultraviolet light has been used to treat a number of skin conditions, including psoriasis. This is because sunlight has an anti-inflammatory action on the skin. When you come for phototherapy you will be assessed according to your skin condition and how you react to sunlight.

PUVA is a combination of a drug called Psoralen (P) and ultra-radiation (UVA) - hence the term PUVA.

**What does the treatment involve?**
The Psoralen medication which is prescribed by the doctor is taken by mouth usually two hours prior to treatment.

The treatment is carried out in an enclosed stand-up cubicle with the door shut so your privacy and dignity is maintained. You may need to fully undress so that all your skin is exposed. The treatment lasts approximately 30 seconds at first and will get longer at each visit until a maximum of eight minutes is reached.

**How many times is treatment needed?**
A course of PUVA is generally 18 - 24 treatment sessions. This may vary depending on individual skin conditions. The treatment sessions are given twice weekly with at least two days between treatment sessions.

In order to get maximum benefit the dose of ultraviolet light has to be increased fairly quickly. Therefore you need to be committed to attend regularly for your treatment. The dose is given according to the way your skin reacts to the ultra-violet light. If you miss any treatments then the dose may be reduced. Please inform us prior to the first treatment session if you plan to be away at any point during the course of therapy.

If you decide to go ahead with the treatment, and understand all the necessary precautions in this leaflet you are required to sign a separate consent form.
Advice about your PUVA treatment.

• Tell us if you are taking any tablets or medicine either prescribed or ones you have bought yourself, as some medication might make you more sensitive to UV light.

• Please inform us if you commence any new medications or creams whilst having treatment.

• We suggest that you have a bath or a shower on the morning of your treatment as your skin must be free from all treatment creams, body sprays, deodorants, perfumes, make-up and lotions. Such preparations can sensitise the skin, producing a stronger response to the light and others act as a barrier, reducing the response to light.

• However, you may be advised in some cases to apply a water based emollient such as aqueous cream, diprobase and E45, about an hour before treatment on affected areas only. This helps with softening of any plaques and also enables the UV light to be absorbed.

• Men must protect their genitalia by wearing dark coloured briefs, a thong or a sock (navy blue or black), otherwise we regret that treatment cannot be given that day.

• Please ensure underwear, if worn, is positioned to cover the same areas on each visit, to avoid burning as exposure times gradually increase.

• Please avoid a radical change of hairstyle partway through a course of therapy for the same reason.

• Please remove your jewellery before treatment.

• You should not sunbathe or use a sun bed during the whole course of your treatment. On sunny days reduce your exposure to the sun’s rays even through window glass to minimise the risk of sunburn. Use a sunscreen with a factor of at least 20 that protects from UVA and UVB rays.

• If your face is unaffected, you will be asked to wear a visor to protect your face.

• If you have rosacea or a history of cold sores, you will be asked to wear a visor during your course of treatment as UV light can trigger it off again. If you have any moles that you wish to protect during the course of treatment you may use sunscreen.

• Eye goggles are provided and must be worn during treatment.

• Avoid significant alcohol consumption.
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• The Psoralen tablets sensitise your eyes to ultra violet light, as well as sensitising your skin. For this reason your eyes must **always** be protected from the time you take the tablet and for up to 24 hours after. It is essential that you wear suitable UV blocking lenses (100% UVA / UVB 400) all day, on treatment day. This applies to all times, no matter how cloudy or dull the weather.

• Because your skin will be extremely sensitive to sunlight after taking the tablets, you will need to protect your skin from sunlight, or you will burn. When coming for treatment you must wear clothing which will protect your skin such as long sleeves and trousers.

• Nausea can occasionally occur after taking the Psoralen. Eating a light meal or snack with the tablet may help to stop this.

• You should not become pregnant while on PUVA or start a course of PUVA if you think you are pregnant.

If there is any possibility that you may be pregnant during the treatment, please inform the staff. This also applies to partners of male patients receiving PUVA.

**Possible risks of your PUVA treatment:**

• Your skin may burn the same way as from strong sunlight. This usually develops 8 - 14 hours after your treatment and settles within 24 hours. You MUST let us know if your skin becomes red and sore.

• It is possible that long-term PUVA treatment increases your risk of developing skin cancer in the same way that sunbathing can cause skin cancer.

• PUVA may cause premature ageing of your skin.

• Not wearing eye goggles may cause serious burns to the eyes, which may increase your risk of developing eye cataracts in the future.

• Your skin may occasionally become itchy and dry, during the course of your treatment. Antihistamines can help with this, as well as frequent use of a moisturiser.

• Your skin condition may temporarily worsen at the beginning of the course.

• On rare occasions patients can develop a heat rash, which is an itchy rash due to sun light. This normally settles after a few days.

If you are unable to attend your appointment please let us know. If you have any queries about the treatment please do not hesitate in contacting the Physiotherapy Department on **01625 661481**.
For further information on the references and sources used for this leaflet, please contact 01625 661184.

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